

KUMR

Kimberley Underground Mining Railway

Seasonal non-profit organization telling local mining histories

Location: Kimberley, Regional District of East Kootenay



The Mining Town that Went Quiet

The Sullivan mine in the East Kootenays was one of the richest lead-zinc sources in the world. Operational for 92 years, generations grew up working in and families were built around the mine. The hum of the powerhouse and the sound of the fans were a constant drone; the pulsing of the equipment was the heartbeat of the town. When the mine closed in 2001, the city went quiet.

"It was like the heartbeat of the city stopped."

As part of the City's economic transition (and with support from mining company Teck Resources), a couple of community champions and a group of volunteers expanded what had been a successful campground railroad in an effort to both celebrate the City's heritage and create new opportunities for Kimberley. Kimberley's Underground Mining Railway (KUMR) was born, and the society began the process of building a cultural institution that could help lead the community through a process of economic revitalization.



Fast forward nearly two decades and KUMR now consists of a thirty-minute train ride with live interpretation, mining shows and a Powerhouse building for visitors to disembark and explore. KUMR is rated as the city's #1 tourist attraction on TripAdvisor and brings in international visitors, academic study groups, local hikers, wedding parties, and conference attendees.

"We make history come to life ... and we've got over a hundred five-star reviews online!"

The journey: Stories, Relationships & Experience

The group of volunteers and champions who formed the Sullivan Mine and Railway Historical Society, known as Kimberley's Underground Mining Railway, didn't set out to be a leader in Kimberley's economic revitalization after the mine closed. Instead, they wanted to preserve and share Kimberley's story. The city wouldn't exist without the mine, and the retired miners had knowledge, insight, and wisdom to share.

By establishing a good relationship with the city staff and with the mining company who leases the land, the KUMR group started building important relationships early. With strict financial management and a focus on sustainable growth, always ensuring that they can maintain their operational expenses from their own revenue, the KUMR team quickly demonstrated a pattern of financial stability. Their transparency,

accountability, and solid financial record has enabled the City to confidently support expansion and other projects.

Part of the reason for the organization's success, they believe, is that they provide a unique experience that has a broad appeal. Visitors can ride the train and explore the city's mining history with a retired miner. The appeal extends beyond history-buffs and mining enthusiasts, though: Hikers take the train as part of their Kimberley experience, wedding parties use the train as a photo opportunity, and geologists use the mine's core samples as educational resources. The diverse appeal, combined with passionate and experienced staff and volunteers, and confident support from the city has meant that the Kimberley Underground Railway has become a flagship attraction that has helped take Kimberley from a mining town to a tourist destination.

"You have to talk to the right people, have a good story, and have some track record."

Exploring economic impact

Kimberley's Underground Mining Railway has an impact that extends beyond numbers. While it provides 12 seasonal jobs for highly-skilled employees, it has also helped revitalize and represent the community. Since KUMR's opening, the Kimberley Alpine Resort has expanded, a conference centre has been built and various other organizations have cropped up around town. Kimberley is no longer filled with the sounds of mining exhaust fans; today it's a well-known place of serenity. Despite the shift from one economy to another, Kimberley hasn't lost its sense of past. The Underground Railway provides a space for miners to share their knowledge and connect visitors and locals alike with the roots of the community. KUMR now works with other local heritage and outdoor attractions to ensure that Kimberley remains a great place to be.

Sharing insights



Scale Up:

- Scale up operations carefully, strategically, and responsibly. With a patient approach and a proven record of success, the team can then confidently apply for funding for new projects.



Increase Diversity:

- KUMR realized early on that the train experience appeals to more than history-buffs; hikers, dog-walkers, golfers, conferences-goers, and many more frequently use the train, making the KUMR experience a quintessential part of a visit to Kimberley.



Focus:

- Staff and volunteers never lose sight of the importance of the experience they create for people - this is their focus. The experience needs to be authentic - that's why they use real railcars and equipment and why the track is mining gauge width.



Train:

- KUMR emphasizes keeping their community's mining knowledge alive, and providing a space where practitioners can work on engines, repair tracks and mining equipment. KUMR also focuses on public education, hosting school and university groups and making sure every mining demonstration gets visitors excited about something new.